

George Washington Whittemore House
329 Harvard Street
Cambridge
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-881

HABS

MASS.

9 - CAMB

14.

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 Nineteenth Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

GEORGE WASHINGTON WHITTEMORE HOUSE

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Location: 329 Harvard Street, north side of street between Hancock and Dana Streets, Middlesex County, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Present Owner: Changed hands several times, 1951-65. Demolished in 1965 to clear site for new apartment house.

Present Occupant: None.

Present Use: Apartments, 1951 to demolition.

Statement of Significance: House was originally remarkable for extensive use of exterior papier maché ornament. Front and side eaves of main block, and cupola were trimmed with molded papier maché "gingerbread" mounted on wooden barge boards, until fire from painter's blow-torch in 1931. Cupola retained trim at least as late as 1951 - evidence of durability of material for exterior use when well-maintained. (Exterior papier maché ornament was rather widely used in Boston suburbs c. 1840-55.) In its eclectic design, house was typical of suburban residences built on Dana Hill c. 1850, when formal Greek Revival tradition was yielding to freer Italianate forms and more picturesque massing.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure was built. References are to Antoinette F. Downing, Elisabeth MacDougall and Eleanor Pearson, Report Two: Mid Cambridge, Cambridge, Cambridge Historical Commission, 1967; Middlesex County Deeds; and letter dated June 6, 1967 from Donald T. Whittemore, great-grandson of George W. Whittemore.
- c. 1775 "Small Lot Hill" (a portion of Dana Hill lying east of the present Dana Street) had been assembled into one large holding in the seventeenth century and had passed through several hands before Francis Dana acquired it around the time of the American Revolution. Downing, Report Two, p. 13.

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- 1811 Francis Dana died. Dictionary of American Biography, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943, Vol. V, pp. 52-54. 14-
- 1819 Four Dana heirs sold mansion and two acres. Downing, Report Two, p. 25.
- 1822 Dana heirs divided rest of estate among themselves. Edmund Trowbridge Dana received Lot 2, bounded by Harvard, Dana, and Lee Streets and Broadway. Ibid., pp. 20, 25.
- 1835 Hancock and Chatham Streets were laid out on E. T. Dana's lot preparatory to subdivision. Ibid., p. 21.
- 1848 In December, 1848 George Washington Whittemore purchased lot measuring 100.80' on south by 225.73' on east by 100.20' on north by 232.32' on west from Edmund Trowbridge Dana. Lot was situated on north side of Harvard Street between Cotton (now Hancock) and Dana Streets and backed on Hastings (now Chatham) Street. Middlesex County Deeds, Liber 540, folio 104.
- 1870 George Henry Whittemore inherited the property from his father, George Washington Whittemore. Letter from Donald Taylor Whittemore dated June 6, 1967.
- 1921 William Richardson Whittemore inherited the property from his brother, George Henry Whittemore. Ibid.
- 1922 Harris Stewart Whittemore acquired the property from his father, William Richardson Whittemore. Ibid.
- 1951 Harris Stewart Whittemore sold the property out of the family in June, 1951. Ibid.
- 1951- After a century in possession of Whittemore family,
1965 house had series of short-term owners in apartment rental business until its demolition in 1965.
2. Date of erection: 1849-50. House was first taxed in 1850 as "unfinished" and valued at \$5,000. In 1851 house had a tax value of \$7,500.
3. Architect: Not known. A remarkably similar house, presumably by the same designer, was erected c. 1850 for John P. Squire, head of a prominent meat packing firm, in Arlington, a suburb adjacent to Cambridge. Now the Daniel F. O'Brien Funeral Home at 226 Massachusetts

Avenue, Arlington, Massachusetts, this house has been altered beyond recognition and sheathed with aluminum siding.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None known.
5. Alterations and additions: In 1922-3 house was modernized. Coal-fired hot air heating system was replaced by oil-fired hot water heating. Gas lighting was electrified. Oak flooring was laid over soft wood floors throughout, except in drawing room, where carpet was retained. Lower run of back stairway was relocated to ascend from ell hall. Butler's pantry was installed between dining room and kitchen in space formerly occupied by back stairs. First floor of ell was altered by making kitchen smaller and providing laundry room and tool room to rear of kitchen. Bathroom was installed in rear of first floor hall area. On second floor, lavatory to serve southeast bedroom was installed in closet formerly opening from northeast bedroom. Lavatory and closet serving northeast bedroom were built in ell, and modern main bathroom was installed in ell. In 1951 house was cut up into apartments. Stable was demolished before 1964.
6. Important old views: Photograph c. 1865 measuring approximately 12" x 17" and showing house, stable, and grounds in original condition, and interior photographs c. 1923-37 showing many original furnishings and 1850 wallpaper and carpet are in possession of Donald Taylor Whittemore. View c. 1865 and one 1937 interior photograph are reproduced in Downing, Report Two, pp. 53 & 56. Early view of John P. Squire house showing remarkable similarity to Whittemore house is illustrated in George W. Engelhardt, Boston, Massachusetts, Boston, 1897, p. 55.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Site was part of estate of Francis Dana, 1743-1811, member of the Continental Congress, first United States Minister to Russia, 1781-3, and Chief Justice of Massachusetts, 1791-1806. Whittemore family was prominent in business and cultural life of Boston and Cambridge. George Washington Whittemore, 1812-70, was a Boston hotel proprietor. George Henry Whittemore, 1839-1921, was a Professor of Divinity at Harvard and active in the Old Cambridge Baptist Church. William Richardson Whittemore, 1855-1935, was Treasurer of the Merchants National Bank of Boston, and Harris Stewart Whittemore, 1881-1966, who ceased to reside in the house in 1949, was a financial officer in Boston business concerns.

C. Sources of Information:

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1. Primary and unpublished sources: Interview in 1937 with Mrs. Harris S. Whittemore. Denys Peter Myers, Jr., A Partial Catalogue of Greek Revival Buildings Extant in Cambridge, 1937 (unpublished illustrated course paper for Fine Arts S7d, Professor Kenneth J. Conant, in Harvard Architectural Library). Middlesex County Records of Deeds. Correspondence with Miss Eleanor Pearson, Coordinator, and Robert Bell Rettig, Associate Survey Director, Cambridge Historical Commission, City Hall Annex, 57 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, 1966-7. Letter dated June 6, 1967 from Donald Taylor Whittemore, 756 Fairview Avenue, Annapolis, Maryland 21403, which included sketch plans of house and stable, chain of title, and details of alterations made in 1922-3.
2. Secondary and published sources: George W. Engelhardt, Boston, Massachusetts, Boston, 1897, p. 55. Dictionary of American Biography, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943, Vol. V, pp. 52-54. Cambridge Historical Commission, Report One: East Cambridge, Cambridge, City of Cambridge, (1965), p. 26. Antoinette F. Downing, Elisabeth MacDougall, and Eleanor Pearson, Report Two: Mid Cambridge, Cambridge, Cambridge Historical Commission, 1967, pp. 12, 13, 20, 21, 25, 53, 56.

Prepared by Dr. Bainbridge Bunting
Survey Director
Cambridge Historical Commission
September 24, 1964
and Denys Peter Myers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
April 26, 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Originally richly ornamented, this suburban house blended Italianate, Greek Revival, and Gothic details in an eclectic but picturesque and singularly harmonious manner. House typified trend away from strict neo-classicism around 1850.
2. Condition of fabric: Badly deteriorated in 1964. Demolished 1965.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 55' (including side porches) x 80' (including ell). Ell, off axis with main block, was approximately 40' long. Three-bayed front; two stories and attic. Ell height diminished progressively in three sections, first two-storied, second one-storied and very slightly narrower, third about 2' lower.
2. Foundations: Granite blocks.
3. Wall construction: Wooden flush siding scored to resemble ashlar on facade and sides. Rear of main block, and ell were clapboarded. East wall of one-story section of ell and northeast and northwest corners of rear section (which contained privies) were originally louvered. Middle section of east ell wall had triple-arched arcade motif applied over louvering. Louvers were later replaced by clapboarding. Walls were painted grey.
4. Framing: Wooden stud, spacing and sizes not determined.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Five granite risers flanked by granite plinths led to granite stoop (sixth riser) recessed within open rectangular front entrance. Stoop was flanked by wooden single-paneled piers projecting half their width beyond facade plane. Within stoop were single-paneled reveals. Wooden ceiling continued well beyond facade plane to form soffit of balcony supported by two large acanthus-ornamented consoles resting partially on the piers. Outer edges of balcony soffit originally had carved and fretted pendent trim. Corner posts of balcony balustrade were originally taller versions of paneled and capped posts supporting railings of bay window and porch roofs. (Of balcony ornaments, only consoles and balusters survived to 1964.) East side porch extended one bay beyond upper rear corner of main block to shelter side door. West side porch was contiguous with main block. Both porches had octagonal posts with plain octagonal bases and unfoliated flaring octagonal capitals of late Gothic type. "Gothick" wooden fretwork spandrels between paneled impost blocks, cavetto cornices, and low cast-iron anthemion-patterned railings supported by low paneled and capped posts completed the repertoire of motifs. Floors, approximately 7'-6" wide, and ceilings were wooden; roofs were tin. Low bulkhead with slightly sloping doors gave exterior access to cellar at northeast corner of main block in angle formed by ell.

6. Chimneys: One tall square brick chimney for original furnace and kitchen range straddled ridge of ell roof at rear of two-story section. As there were no fireplaces, pair of paneled wooden dummy chimneys with dentilled cornices originally flanked cupola on main roof ridge as decorations and concession to convention.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Round-arched front doorway was deeply recessed within stoop sheltered by balcony. Spandrels had acanthus bas-relief panels. Sill was one riser above stoop. Two concentric archways enclosed six clear glass sidelights above small panels and below horizontal mullions at springing line of arches, and four plain (not etched or engraved) colored lights between horizontal mullions and single vertical mullion at top center. Round-headed door approximately 3" thick had six inset panels, of which two at doorknob height were round. Four-paneled door opening from east side porch was set within simple rectangular architrave and had rectangular transom. Doorway in center of east wall, middle section of ell, had semi-circular three-light transom with two vertical muntins. Original door was four-paneled. Later door had twelve lights, single panel below glazing.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All windows had double-hung wooden sash. Triple-arched window (six-over-four-light center, three-over-two-light sides) under segmental-arched corniced lintel opened on balcony above front entrance. Papier maché anthemion relief above, and separate from, lintel cornice ornamented subsidiary gable. Very slightly splayed bay windows (four-over-four-light centers, two-over-two-light sides) flanked entrance. Their bases, piers, and lintels were single-paneled; cornices and roof railings matched those of porches. Other windows of main block had six-over-six-light sash, single-paneled pilaster-like side trim, molded sills, and single-paneled lintels with flat projecting molded cornices. Frames, originally closed-shuttered dummy windows, were centered on first and second floors of each side, aligning vertically with full-sized window in each main gable. Cupola windows, simply framed with continuous sills forming string course, had two-over-two-light sash. Ell windows had unmolded sills and simply molded architraves.

Two windows flanking east ell door were not original. Small rectangular windows in north ell wall had six-light single sash (originally lighted two privies). All windows except cupola originally had adjustable-louvered exterior shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Slate-covered gable roof of approximately 33-degree pitch had ridge parallel with front. Subsidiary lower front gable was slightly over two fifths total width of facade. Three ell roofs were gabled, ridges running at right angle to main block.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Unbracketed eaves incorporating gutters in filleted and cyma recta moldings projected approximately 2', originally had barge boards of wood and papier maché.
- c. Cupola: Octagonal cupola approximately 8' in diameter straddled main roof ridge, originally had barge boards similar to those of main eaves but smaller-scaled. Tin cupola roof originally had low railing matching porch and bay window roof railings.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Note: Descriptions refer to arrangements before alterations of 1922-3. For alterations, vide supra.

- a. First floor: Center hall approximately 8' wide was partitioned beyond stairs, making front and rear halls in main block. Drawing room approximately 15' x 35' on west side had doors from front and rear halls and connected by sliding doors with library in one-story flat-roofed section in northwest angle formed by main block and ell. Library had sliding door into ell hall behind rear hall of main block. Front, rear, and ell halls were on axis and interconnected by doors. Two closets, one opening from rear hall and one from dining room, occupied east half of rear hall on axis with front stairs. On east side of main block, reception room approximately 15' x 15' at southeast corner opened from front hall and connected by sliding doors with dining room, which

had side door to east porch and door to foot of back stairs between dining room and kitchen. Kitchen on east side of ell had doors to ell hall, back stairs, cellar stairs (under dining room and rear hall closets), and louver-sided storage room in one-story (middle) section of ell. Ell hall turned east at north end to give access to two privies in last section of ell. First-floor ceilings in main block were 12'-6" high.

- b. Second floor: In main block, two bedrooms opened east and west from front hall and two from back hall. There were two closets between each pair of bedrooms. Bedrooms did not connect with each other. Back hall continued into ell, gave access to bedroom across north end and bathroom (possibly originally a bedroom) and closets between back stairs and north room. Attic stairs ascended from back hall.
 - c. Attic: Two finished bedrooms opened from attic stair hall. A large hall in center contained cupola stairs. Two bedroom closets were placed back to back under south slope of roof.
- 2. Stairways: Cellar stairs descended from kitchen under dining room and rear hall closets. Nineteen-riser front stairs were along east wall of front hall; last six risers turned in forty-five degree curve. Lowest two risers swelled forward slightly. Bottom riser end and mahogany railing formed volute in plan; open spiral of plain round mahogany banisters surrounded newel post. Back stairs (later relocated) originally rose in straight enclosed run toward west between dining room and kitchen, had staple-turned newel post, 1"-diameter round banisters. Attic stairs began in back hall, ascended toward front to landing, made right angle turn west to second landing, and right angle turn south again to attic stairhall. Attic stairs were lighted by skylight on north slope of roof. Cupola stairs were circular, spiralled up from separate hall in center of attic.
 - 3. Flooring: Original soft pine floors (some carpeted, some with straw matting) were later overlaid with oak.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls were plastered and papered above baseboards, which were 1'-6" high in principal rooms. Drawing room had 1'-3"-deep plaster full entablature enriched with Greek running moldings,

two rectangular recessed ceiling panels with incurved corners and acanthus-molded reveals, and acanthus rosettes over two chandeliers. Reception and dining rooms had simpler molded cornices, and plainer ceiling panels and center rosettes. Other rooms and halls lacked plaster cornices but had wooden picture moldings.

5. Doorways and doors: First-floor doors of main block were 10' high, had 1'-3" bottom rails, 8" stiles, and two vertical inset panels.
6. Decorative features and trim: Single-paneled pilasters with 1'-high plinths and gessoed papier maché Greek Corinthian capitals flanked all drawing room openings and "supported" plaster entablature. Similar pilasters with another form of Greek Corinthian capital supported single-paneled flat-corniced lintels of front hall interior doors. Narrower, unpaneled pilasters with simple Doric capitals supported single-paneled flat-corniced door and window lintels in reception and dining rooms. Sliding doors between drawing room and library had wide, single-mirrored panels on drawing room side. Red flock-ed drawing room wallpaper with cream and gilt ground dated from 1850 and remained to end of Whittemore occupancy. (Drawing room also had original richly colored imported carpet, red velvet lambrequins with gilded cornices, and set of very elaborate neo-rococo furniture inspired by Louis XV forms. Set included two white marble-topped tables, mirrored étagère with low marble-topped console, and chairs, sofa, and footstool upholstered in original red velvet. Furniture frames were coated with molded composition and gesso painted soft grey and touched up with gilding. Curtain cornices and furniture were made by group of travelling Swiss artisans skilled in compo work and frame making, according to family records. Their names were not recorded. Marble busts of Hiram Powers' Persephone and the Apollo Belvedere, a plaster bust of Washington, two oval family portraits of young girls c. 1850, an oil copy of Guido Reni's Aurora, alabaster vases, parian ware figurines, and a multitude of bibelots completed the lavish drawing room ensemble, which remained intact until 1949.)
7. Notable hardware: Front doorknob, keyhole escutcheon and cover, bell pull, and knocker were silvered. Door hardware in principal rooms was silvered; doorknobs were clear molded glass.

8. Lighting: Until 1949, drawing room had two brass and ormolu three-light gasoliers "in the French taste" and four ormolu and crystal sconces, each with seven porcelain gas candles. Library had bronze-finished brass and ormolu three-light gasolier of Renaissance Revival design. Hall had gilded grapevine-patterned single-light suspended fixture and, in niche at curve of stairs, plaster neo-classical draped female figure holding torch. Reception room had ormolu and crystal chandelier originally fitted with eight porcelain gas candles. These fixtures dated from 1850. All, except sconces, had been electrified. Other fixtures were modern.
9. Heating: Original coal-fired hot air furnace and floor registers were replaced by oil-fired hot water heating system with radiators in 1922-3. House never had fireplaces. Registers, except in drawing room, were filled in when floors were resurfaced.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House faced south by southwest at 329 Harvard Street on Dana Hill, once a typical prosperous suburban mid-nineteenth-century neighborhood with many large houses on extensive lots. Area is now increasingly given over to apartment houses.
2. Enclosures: Quarry-faced granite retaining wall with smooth-cut coping, approximately 2'-6" high, ran across front of property and was interrupted by granite steps to front walk and by entrance to driveway flanked by granite gate posts with bollards cut from same blocks. Tops of posts were cut in very low pyramidal shape. Original wooden picket side fences and wooden rear fence were later replaced by chain-link fences.
3. Outbuildings: Rectangular one-story-and-loft three-bayed stable, main block approximately 28' x 18', one-story flat-roofed ell extending north approximately 16', was standing in 1950. Foundation material is undetermined. Front and sides had wooden flush siding scored to imitate ashlar; rear was clapboarded. Framing was wooden stud. Front doorway with sliding wooden double doors was flanked by six-over-six-light double-hung wooden sash windows. First-floor openings had plain architraves with projecting lintel cornices. Single sliding hay door immediately above lintel cornice

of double doorway rose into subsidiary gable with hoist beam at apex. Slate-covered gable roof with ridge parallel with front had overhanging eaves incorporating gutters. Square wooden cupola straddled roof ridge and had louvered arched openings on each face and metal-covered domed roof with ball finial and gilded arrow weather vane. Main block of stable contained carriage room with loft above. Stairs to loft began in north-east corner of carriage room, ran west along north wall. Ell, entered from carriage room through sliding door, had three stalls on west side. Stable faced approximately east by southeast. South gable wall was aligned with ell of house. Stable was near rear of lot toward northwest corner.

Relatively modern square latticed gazebo with asphalt-shingled hipped roof stood across driveway from east side of ell of house.

4. Walks: Retaining wall fronted on brick, granite-curbed public sidewalk, which originally had cast-iron horse-headed hitching post with octagonal base, four lion masks below shaft, and fluted shaft with molded necking. Hitching post stood opposite front walk. Modern cement walk ran from lower steps to entrance steps. Driveway to stable had been paved with cement.
5. Landscaping: Lot measured approximately 100' wide with extreme depth of approximately 232'. Planting was informal, with several large trees, including two fine copper beech trees, shrubbery, including forsythia, and lawn. Originally, larches and fir trees were set out at street (south) side of lawn.

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